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THE BLOODY JEST

A DRAMA IN
FOUR ACTS

BY
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THE GORHAM PRESS
RICHARD G. BADGER
BOSTON

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PS3509

F1B6

1922

Made in the United States of America

The Gorham Press, Boston, U. S. A.

AUG -7 1922

©Cl.A681278

no 1

TO MY DEAR SISTER

IDA



FOREWORD

The source of the plot is to be found in Gregorio Leti's "Life of Sixtus V," where Seche—in this play, Antonio—claims a pound of flesh from a Roman Jew, named Samson Cenada, as the result of a wager. This is elaborated in Wolf Pascheles' "Sippurim," a German collection of Jewish tales, part IV, pp. 202-210, and was thence rendered into English by Claud Field in his "Jewish Legends of the Middle Ages." Pascheles naively remarks: "Dieser Sage entnahm England's grosses Dichter Shakespeare den Stoff zu seinem 'Kaufmann von Venedig'."



THE BLOODY JEST



PERSONS

SAMSON

ROSALINE, *his daughter*

URIEL, *her fiancé*

NERISSA, *maid in the house of Samson*

ANTONIO

MARTHA, *his maid*

BEGGAR-POPE, *Pope Sixtus V clad as a beggar*

MONSIGNOR SANGALETTO, *secret cameriere to the
Pope*

TAILORS AND TAILORESSES

COOK

NAHUM, *the rhymester*

BAND OF MUSICIANS

DOCTOR

BEPPPO } *Workmen*
CECCO }

CHIEF AUDITOR

SENATOR

MOB OF MEN AND WOMEN

TIME: 1587 A.D. PLACE: Rome.



THE BLOODY JEST

ACT I

SCENE I

A drawing room in the house of SAMSON: A candelabrum hangs down from the ceiling. In the background, large windows screened with embroidery curtains. It is Saturday evening at sunset. Red rays enter through the curtained windows and play on the floor. NERISSA, an elderly maid, sits and dozes. From an adjoining room to the right, ROSALINE is heard singing softly:

God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob,
Father of our ancient race,
Holy Sabbath bids us farewell,
And a new week comes apace.

May the new week bring us tidings
That will comfort and console,
Bring a healing to the body,
And a healing to the soul.

May it bring us many blessings,
And a shield against all ill;
And thy sheep that stray and wander,
Lord, bring back to Zion's hill.

MARTHA, *a servant girl to ANTONIO, enters through the left door.*

MARTHA

Nerissa!

NERISSA

(Starts.)

Martha! Why how is my dearest Martha? And is it time to make a light?

MARTHA

It is dark enough, Nerissa. You cannot see two inches from your nose.

NERISSA

But you forget this is a Jewish house. At the house of Samson no light is to be kindled until the holy Sabbath is all gone, all gone. But you are gentile, Martha. How can you understand?

MARTHA

And you, Nerissa?

NERISSA

I have been long enough here to be one of the family. *(Goes to the window.)* Why, you are right, Martha. It's time to light the lamp. I see stars.

MARTHA

Does not your Jewish master ever make you see stars by day?

NERISSA

Why no, Martha. *(Hurries off to light the candelabrum.)*

MARTHA

Well, I wouldn't have such a master for all the Jewish ducats in Rome. (*ROSALINE is heard again singing while NERISSA lights the candelabrum.*) Why, who is it singing this dirge?

NERISSA

It's Rosaline, my master's daughter.

MARTHA

Oh, Rosaline! Antonio, has mentioned that name many a time. I'd love to see her, Nerissa. Is she fair?

NERISSA

Fair like all Jewish daughters. But she is fairer, and good too. And yet in her childhood, soon after the death of her mother, she was a stubborn little thing. I taught her how a Jewess must behave and she wouldn't be taught. I taught her the Jewish morning prayers, grace after meal, and all that a good Jewess, a daughter of Samson, should do, but she just giggled and tittered. Oh, how I grieved and pleaded: "Rosaline dear, say your prayers. Woe is me, you will grow up to be a gentile, woe is me." But she just giggled and giggled and said, "Nerissa, time for you to become a preacher in the synagogue." But now, —here she is coming, Martha.

ROSALINE

(Enters.)

Good Nerissa, is it not strange that father and Uriel haven't yet returned from the Synagogue?

NERISSA

They went to the Castilian Synagogue to hear a Rabbi from Turkey preach, and that's a mile or two from here. Be calm, they will be here by and by. But, Rosaline, do you know my friend Martha?

ROSALINE

No, I do not, but I am happy to meet a friend of my Nerissa.

MARTHA

My master often speaks of you, sweet lady.

ROSALINE

Who is your master?

MARTHA

Antonio.

ROSALINE

Oh, Count Antonio Zavello! He is a good friend of our family, and a frequent visitor. Father owes the Count countless thanks. But forgive me. I hear them coming.

(NERISSA and MARTHA *withdraw through the left door*. SAMSON and URIEL *enter through the right*.)

Good evening, father dear; good evening, Uriel. How did the Rabbi preach?

SAMSON

So wonderful;

He made my blood race swiftly in my veins,
And made my heart beat faster to a music
Of golden days unborn, but sure to come.
He spoke of the Messiah, David's scion,

Who dwells with beggars at the gate of Rome,
Rags covering his body full of pains;
And ever and anon he shields his eyes
And strains his ears to hear approaching steps.
Ah, yet a day will dawn, a wondrous day,
Elijah's feet will stand on Mount Zion,
Clear silver blasts will cleave the morning air
And shout redemption and awakening.
Messiah from the ashes will arise
And sit on David's throne, and all the nations
Will come and kiss the fringes of his garment,
And weep and beg forgiveness; and blessed love
Will sing and wave white wings in every heart.

ROSALINE

You speak, good father, like a young-eyed
dreamer.

SAMSON

Aye, Rosaline, when at our past I gaze,
I age, the wrinkles in my forehead deepen,
The heart in me turns indolent and loses
Its will to beat; but turning futureward
Age melts like Samson's binding ropes,
And youth sits in a corner in my soul
And dreams the brightest dreams that youth can
dream.

But ah, Uriel, why so sad and pensive?
Have not the Rabbi's visions thrilled your spirit?
Or is it true that to discern the future
One must have known the past; and only age
Can be acutely young?

URIEL

The future cheers you,
But inapproachably the future lies
In the ever receding country called To-morrow.
What of To-day, the only land we breathe in?

SAMSON

What ails To-day?

URIEL

Oh, father, do you see
No sombre cloud hung o'er our firmament?

SAMSON

Clouds make the heavens beautiful and drive
The luminous monotony away.
I tell you this, Uriel, and no more:
God's in his heaven, and Messiah sits
Among the beggars at the gate of Rome.
Whom do we fear, my boy? But I must haste
To make my weekly reckoning wherein
Colossal debit will look down in scorn
Upon my pigmy credit.

(Goes toward the door at the right, humming:)

Behold He doth not slumber,
And He doth not sleep,
The guardian of Israel.

(Calls out from the adjoining room.)

If Count Antonio Zavello comes,
Pray call me in, dear Rosaline.

ROSALINE

I shall, I shall, dear father.

(Pause. Humming continues.)

What think you now, Uriel?

URIEL

I think your father
Is much to be admired.

ROSALINE

He is, indeed,
So full of trust, so full of confidence.

URIEL

What would I not so gladly give away
For blissful blindness to the sordid present,
And cloudless vision of a dreamed hereafter.
Alas, I see too clearly our condition.
We are confined into a squalid ghetto,
Like loathsome and contaminating lepers,
To writhe, to molder, and to perish slowly.
A badge of shame they hung upon our back
As if we were the convicts of the world,
The God-condemned, the fratricidal Cains.
Believe me, dear, I ne'er forget the badge
That burns me like a burning coal of fire.

ROSALINE

But think, Uriel, all this notwithstanding,
In spite of badges, ghettos, persecutions,
That would have hacked to death the soul and
body
Of any people, Israel still lives.

URIEL

You call it "life", 'tis but a slow decay.

(*Pause. SAMSON's humming is heard.*)

ROSALINE

You have not always harbored such dread thoughts.

What altered you, Uriel?

URIEL

Since my childhood

When I was left a lorn and lonely orphan,
And your kind father took me in his care,
I hearkened to his stories of Messiah,
Who sits with beggars at the gate of Rome,
And I believed and waited patiently.
Of late, I know not why, a change came o'er me;
I'll tell you, dearest Rosaline. Last year,—
It was the fast day of the month of Ab,
The day when fifteen centuries ago
Rome vanquished us and hurled a torch which set
Our glorious Jerusalem on fire.
The day was hot and through the Lateran
I walked to seek the river's cooling breath,
And when I passed St. John's basilica,
I saw the two bronze columns of our Temple
Engraved: "King Solomon, the son of David."
I kneeled before the relics of our glory,
But suddenly I noticed drops of tears,
Small globules gliding on their cheeks of bronze.
My heart was moved, and I embraced them
warmly
And understood the reason why they wept:

Their own shrine lies in ruins and desolation
And they themselves must prop a church of
Rome.

Since then I often ask myself: How long?
And I'm a prey to cruel questionings.

ROSALINE

I wish I knew a word to soothe your spirit.

URIEL

Aye, dearest Rosaline, I know the word
Which, when I utter, joy pervades my heart,
A word so sweet, so musical, methinks
When God so many million years ago
Stood in the midst of grey and shapeless Nothing,
He sang it and a lovely world was born.

ROSALINE

What is this magic word?

URIEL

It's Rosaline.

ROSALINE

You are jesting now and yet I'll pardon it
If you assure you will not go to Padua.

URIEL

I must, my dear, I must.

ROSALINE

Say not, you must;
You go because you wish to go. I know
There are in Padua heavy tomes of wisdom,
And I'm a simple girl. I should not keep you.
But I'm so lonely here.

URIEL

You foolish child

You think I leave you willingly. You know not
How sick I am of their philosophy.
They seek to learn what God is, what are angels,
And I am still at sea concerning man.
They scale the skies, I blindly walk the earth.
They delve into the secrets of creation
To make a man, a soulless man, a Golem.
I think we have such Golems now galore,
No need, it seems, to manufacture more.

ROSALINE

If so, why leave me dear? You do not know
The bitterness, the loneliness of longing,

URIEL

I do, I do, my darling.

ROSALINE

Why then leave?

Or maybe I should speak to father?

URIEL

No,

I spoke to him already.

ROSALINE

Did you, dear?

And what did he reply?

URIEL

That 'tis not seemly

To be too much together with one's bride.
It is not meet, he said. Well, let me go then.
It's three months only. Time will quickly fly
And then—oh, then! My Rosaline, my dear,—

(NERISSA enters and, having spied ROSALINE and URIEL embracing, she hurries out. Now she enters after giving due notice with the clearing of her throat and stamping of her feet.)

NERISSA

The Count Antonio Zavello is here.

ROSALINE

Oh, father, Count Antonio is here.

(NERISSA withdraws. SAMSON enters.)

SAMSON

How is my Count Antonio Zavello?

ANTONIO

As usual, your warmest friend, my Samson.
And how are you, Uriel? Why so quick
From Padua?

URIEL

I've come to visit my good father
And Rosaline. Tomorrow I depart.

ANTONIO

Sweet Rosaline will grieve at your departure,
But I shall seek to make my visits frequent,
For timid sorrow knocks not at the door
When company is heard within.

URIEL

Good Count,
For this you'll earn my deepest gratitude.

ANTONIO

Well, Samson, what good news from your finances?

It seems you have become quite prosperous,
You ask no longer for a little loan.

SAMSON

I thank you for the interest you take.

ANTONIO

I take both interest and capital.

SAMSON

I mean your interest in my affairs.
Indeed, I wish to speak to you. Not here.
Come down, amico, to our wine-shop. There
A glass of reddish wine shall lubricate
The joints of conversation.

ANTONIO

Well bethought.

Fair Rosaline, your father takes me downwards
And gladly do I go to his Inferno.

ROSALINE

Oh, father, take a torch. It is so dark.
And guard your steps.

ANTONIO

To land in the Inferno
Is easier when we guard not our steps.

SAMSON

Well said, good friend. Come, come. I blaze
the way.

ANTONIO

I follow. Fairest Rosaline, goodbye.
Just for a little while, a tiny while. (*Exeunt.*)

SCENE II

SAMSON'S *Wine Shop*.

ANTONIO

So this is whence the liquid exultation,
The fluid joy, for all the Romans flows.

SAMSON

Aye, so it did, but now a stranger comes
And steals my bread away. But tell me first
What wine, Antonio, you cherish most:
Cicilian or French or Rhenish vintage?

ANTONIO

I'm catholic in taste. No wine is bad.
Yet give me Rhenish wine. They say Rhine
 maidens
Are beautiful. I'm sure young Jewesses
Have greater grace, if only Rosaline
Be taken as a sample.

SAMSON

Yes, she's fair,
A perfect copy of her sainted mother.
Her sable hair, her big black eyes, her brow
So white, so tender one can almost see
The thoughts that walk within, all that and more
She owes to her, to Rachael, my loved wife.
Sometimes I see her sunk in meditation
And feel like crying out: Rachel, Rachel!
She is my only treasure. Drink, my friend.

ANTONIO

Here is to your treasure! (*Drinks.*)

THE BLOODY JEST

SAMSON

Many, many thanks,

ANTONIO

But, Samson, why did you forget yourself?

SAMSON

Nay, nay, did you forget? I am a Jew
And can not wine or dine with you.

ANTONIO

Indeed,

I did forget. But pardon if I ask:
Do you believe we Gentiles are so low
That we contaminate?

SAMSON

Not low, not high,

But different, good Antonio, just different.
And different from each other let us stay.
He has an untrained eye who can not see
That many different colors make the rainbow;
And he a callous ear that can not feel
The ecstasy of rich and varied sounds.
And thus the world would be the poorer if
One people were to cease to sing its song
In mankind's many throated symphony.
You, live and worship God in your own way,
Indeed, I love you more on that account.

ANTONIO

I'd be much happier, if some one else
Would love me. Samson, here I raise my glass
To mankind's symphony and Rosaline! (*Drinks.*)

ROSALINE
(*From above.*)

Oh, father dear, the mendicant is here.

SAMSON
Why, send him down to us, sweet daughter.

ANTONIO
Who is that beggar whom you freely grant
admittance?

SAMSON
He is a beggar, that is all I know,
A Christian and yet learned in Jewish lore,
A pauper and yet full of happiness.
I like him. Oft I heard when yet a child
That at the gate of Rome Messiah sits
Clad as a mendicant; and even now
Whenever I see a beggar I suspect him
Of being a Messiah or some saint.

ROSALINE
Walk cautiously, old man. The steps are narrow.

BEGGAR-POPE
Many thanks, sweet girl. I'll hold on to the
balustrade and if the steps don't crack beneath
my feet I shall not fall. So here I am. Pax
vobiscum, friends. Or may be I intrude upon
you; just tell me and I'll lift up my young legs
and climb up as fast as the fastest snail.

SAMSON
No, you are welcome, dear brother.

ANTONIO

I raise my glass to Messiah and to Rosaline!
(*Drinks.*)

BEGGAR-POPE

Who is this strange winebibber?

ANTONIO

I'm Count Antonio Zavello.

BEGGAR-POPE

And I am Beggar Vincenti Felitissimo.

ANTONIO

I'm highly honored to be vouchsafed the rare privilege of meeting Beggar Vincenti Felitissimo.

BEGGAR-POPE

Yes, beggars are highly honourable. True they have nothing, but they are something.

ANTONIO

And Counts?

BEGGAR-POPE

They have something but are nothing.

ANTONIO

Is it not possible to *have* and to *be* something?

BEGGAR-POPE

Hardly, hardly, mio amico. For the more one has, the less one is.

ANTONIO

You mean to say, beggar, you crave for no wealth, no money?

BEGGAR-POPE

Money—'tis the most damnable curse inflicted upon mankind by the Lord's adversary. Take the most tender, the most feeling, the most human man and give him wealth, and before long he will become as cold and hardened as the coins that tinkle in his pocket. No heart is so callous, so insensible to the woes and agonies of suffering humanity as the heart that is smugly encased in gold. 'Tis a damnable thing.

ANTONIO

I guess you are right. And so I drink to the most honorable people on earth, the beggars! (*Drinks.*) Samson, why not give your eminently noble guest a bumper of your richest wine?

BEGGAR-POPE

No, no, no. I drink no wine.

ANTONIO

Well, then, you quaff wine. All honorable people do.

BEGGAR-POPE

No, no. You see, there are three stages: no drinking, drinking a little and drinking much. In the first stage man is comparable to a lamb, so innocent, so tame. In the second stage man becomes aware of a sudden strength and vigor and is comparable to a lion. In the third stage, that of drinking much, man loses all sense of modesty and seemliness and is comparable to the king of the mire, his majesty, the pig. I'm still in the lamb stage.

ANTONIO

But, my dear lambkin, why not become just a lion?

BEGGAR-POPE

I fear the lure of the third degree. So tempt me not. But I see that my good friend, Samson, has something to negotiate with you, Count. Is it not so, Samson?

SAMSON

Yes, my good friend, something important.

BEGGAR-POPE

Well, then, I shall not disturb. I shall sit at a distance and eat my crusty bread which I chew with greater gusto than his Holiness, the Pope, eats his delicious viands in the Vatican. Here I'll sit.

SAMSON

Thank you heartily, good brother.
And now, Antonio, I wish to tell you
What fills my heart with gerat anxiety.

ANTONIO

With great impatience do I lend my ear
To what good Samson has to say.

SAMSON

Oh, Count,
You've been a most devoted friend to me
And to my family. I owe you thanks
Beyond expression for your many favors.
I wish to ask another favor now.

ANTONIO

Quick, Samson, let us hear.

SAMSON

You surely know
My daughter to Uriel is affianced.
The wedding day is fixed for three months hence.
What deeper gladness than to see one's child
In wedlock joined! My Rachel in her grave
Awaits impatiently the nuptial day.
Alas, I lack the wherewithal, the money,
The damned money, but thrice damned when
You have it not. Antonio, I need
Two thousand ducats.

ANTONIO

Have I e'er refused you?

SAMSON

But, good Antonio, alas this time
I have no pledge to give you. All my gold
And jewels I have sold. I have no pledge.

ANTONIO

I need no pledge except yourself, yourself.

SAMSON

Oh, kind, devoted friend, Antonio.

ANTONIO

Why, you yourself are good security.
Indeed, I do not need the whole of you.

SAMSON

What mean you, good Antonio?

ANTONIO

Will not a piece of you be worth the loan?

SAMSON

You price me highly, friend. You manifest
Surprising trust and generosity.

ANTONIO

Then call a scribe and cause to set it down:
You pawn a slice, let's say a pound of you,
A pound of Samson's flesh and from his breast.

BEGGAR-POPE

Why, I congratulate the most worthy Count
on becoming a butcher and a meat dealer. Now
don a blood-soiled apron, take a long knife and
learn many tales—yes, wild ones—to tell the
women on meat market day, and you'll outdo all
the butchers in Rome.

ANTONIO

Let the beggar cling to his obscure corner and
not become too familiar.

BEGGAR-POPE

Yes, nobility. I did forget, I did forget.
Well, I must take leave. The Holy Father begged
me to sleep in the Vatican tonight. So farewell,
Samson.

SAMSON

Fare you well, brother, and good night.

BEGGAR-POPE

And farewell, excellent highness! Farewell,
farewell, farewell. (*Exit.*)

ANTONIO

Deranged cur!

SAMSON

Uriel, Uriel, come down and bring along some writing materials.—My Uriel will act as scribe. He has a neat and artistic hand. Many a Roman lad came to him to write their love epistles.

ANTONIO

Is this how he acquired the art of love making?

URIEL

(Enters with ROSALINE.)

Here I am, father, and here the material you desire.

SAMSON

Well, sit down here, my scribe, and I shall dictate to you. "With the help of heaven. This is to acknowledge that I borrowed two thousand ducats from Count Antonio Zavello. I am to return the aforesaid amount with . . ."

ANTONIO

With thirty-two per cent interest.

SAMSON

Yes, "with thirty-two per cent interest within three months from this date. Furthermore, I pledge a pound of my flesh at my breast—"

ROSALINE

You can not give such a pledge. It's unheard of and brutal.

URIEL

It's savage and truculent and inhuman. I can not spell it.

SAMSON

Oh, offend not my good Antonio. See you not it is but a jest, a mock pledge showing the magnanimity of my devoted friend who lends me money without having any earthly security. Come, come, Uriel, write: "at my breast, for the payment of my debt, in default of which my pledge be forfeited. Signed on this day, July 19, 1587." Now I'll affix my name.

(He signs his name.)

Here, good Antonio, here's your bond.

ANTONIO

And here are your two thousand ducats.

SAMSON

I thank you, good Antonio, I thank you.
Your aid is gauged not by the sum of ducats
But by the greatness of the need.

ANTONIO

The hour is late
And I must hasten hence ; so good night, Samson.
Good night, Uriel, and a happy journey.
And farewell, sweet and lovely Rosaline.

(Bows before ROSALINE and departs.)

SAMSON

Farewell, farewell, my Count Antonio.

URIEL

I like not this Antonio.

ROSALINE

He has a vicious look.

SAMSON

Pray, think not evil of our benefactor.
All windows of my heart fly open now,
And happiness, like April winds, runs through
 them
And fills with singing all my inner chambers.
Tomorrow I shall call the best of tailors
And buy the rarest silk and finest satin,
And Rosaline shall have fair wedding garments.
Ah, three months more and exquisite musicians
Shall play that Rachel in her grave may hear
And send you blessings. . Come, my children,
Come press yourselves to me, my dearest children.

CURTAIN

ACT II

*A drawing room as in the opening of the first act.
A group of tailors and tailoresses work at
the wedding garments of ROSALINE.*

ONE TAILOR

Well, let's sing. Begin.

ALL

Ply the needle, ply the needle,
Stitch and baste and sew ;
God made all, yet some are happy,
Some are friends with woe.

FIRST TAILORESS

Ply and ply the tailor's needle,
How my fingers smart ;
Wedding robes I make for others,
Break my lonely heart.

ALL

Ply the needle, ply the needle,
Stitch and baste and sew ;
God made all, yet some are happy,
Some are friends with woe.

SECOND TAILORESS

Fair the bride is, white and tender,
Handsome is the groom ;
I have, too, a milk white skin,
Alas, for whom, for whom?

ALL

Ply the needle, etc.

THIRD TAILORESS

See the silk is skyey azure,
Soft as love's warm breath;
But for me there are long white shrouds,
And the kiss of death.

ALL

Ply the needle, etc.

FOURTH TAILORESS

She will don this nuptial garment,
She will beam with bliss;
We who gladness make for others,
Know not what it is.

ALL

Ply the needle, etc.

ONE TAILORESS

Ouch, ouch! I stuck a whole needle into my
finger. This damned stuff!

A TAILOR

Quickly take it out. It's an expensive needle.

SECOND TAILOR

(Bursts into loud laughter.)

Ha, ha, ha!

THIRD TAILOR

What now, Sartor?

SECOND TAILOR

Ha, ha, ha! I sewed up the sleeve. Ha, ha, ha!

A TAILORESS

He must have thought the bride was Venus of Milo, without arms.

A TAILOR

Indeed a woman needs no arms to conquer.

A TAILORESS

Nowadays a woman needs both arms and brains.

A TAILOR

And a good-looking face besides. And here comes a perfect blending of the three necessities: arms, face and apartments to let! Hail to your corpulent majesty! What's news in Kitchenland?

(Enter the cook, obese and short.)

COOK

I'm so busy. Everything is fine, thank heavens. The broth is like liquid gold, the chicken is so soft and so sweet that it just dissolves on the tongue and the fish, well, who in Rome can outdo Samson's cook in making fish? Small wonder that the paupers, for whom special feasts are now daily prepared, eat like hungry wolves, fish, fork and plate. But detain me not. I'm too busy. Nerissa, buy me some sugar. Did you ever see anything like it? I was going to put in some sugar into the apple sauce and by mistake I poured in a glass of salt. You see, I'm so dreadfully busy.

A TAILOR

But madam cook—

COOK

No, no, no, detain me not.
(*Runs to the door.*)

A TAILOR

Oh, lady cook—

COOK

No, no, no! Nerissa, some sugar!
(*Runs out.*)

A TAILORESS

I don't think I'd like that apple-sauce.

A TAILOR

Well, after all, do we not do with our lives precisely what she did with the apple sauce? How many growing youths, favored by the fates, endowed with talents, with life before them royally seasoned with hopes and dreams, suddenly with their own hands—give me my shears, brother,—yes, with their own hands fling a glass of salt or do something else and lo! their lives turn so vapid that their own palate revolts against it and their own soul sickens.

ANOTHER TAILOR

Cease your culinary philosophy or you'll sew up another sleeve, sartor.

Hush, here is Samson coming with a whole gang. Let's sing.

ALL

Ply the needle, ply the needle,
Stitch and baste and sew;
God made all, yet some are happy,
Some are friends with woe.

(Enter SAMSON and NAHUM, the Rhymester with
a small band of musicians, talking noisily.)

NAHUM

I take it this is Samson's residence
And Samson is a Jew of prominence.

(A flourish of music.)

And Samson's daughter, Rosaline by name
Is Rome's most beautiful, most lovely dame.

(A flourish of music.)

And at her wedding all the girls are glad,
And every lad but one is deeply sad.

(A flourish of music.)

So let us drink and drinking wish to you
The friendliest "Good Luck" and then—adieu!

(A long flourish of music.)

SAMSON

You show wonderful skill, Nahum.—Nerissa,
oh, Nerissa! Some wine for these good friends.

NAHUM

Well, what is the matter, Samson? You
appear to me rather downcast.

SAMSON

No, no, I am very happy.

NAHUM

No, you are not. For shame, doleful and de-
jected a few days before your daughter's
wedding. Think of it! Your daughter's wed-
ding! Think of it! You are getting rid of a
daughter! Dance and jump and be happy,
Samson.

A TAILOR

Who taught you to rhyme?

NAHUM

The art of rhyming is a talent
Of greatest worth;
It comes not with excessive learning,
It comes with birth.

It is the art of seeing likeness
In word and thing;
It is the art of wedding sounds
To make them sing.

Religion is but earth arhyming
With skies above;
And when two hearts in tune are chiming,
We call it love.

A TAILOR

Well, if you are a rhyme adept, what rhymes
with Rosaline?

NAHUM

Uriel, sir.

A TAILOR

But it does not.

NAHUM

It does, sir, in love.

(NERISSA *brings in wine for all. They drink.*)

For life, Samson. May God help you to derive
much joy from your children, May God help you
to lead your grandchildren to the canopy, may . . .
may . . . may . . .

ALL

For life, for life!

SAMSON

For life and peace. May God help us all.

NAHUM

And do you wish to see how well Nahum the Rhymster can execute the Halleluiah dance?

A TAILOR

I trust you will not execute it.

NAHUM

This dance I inherited from my father, the wealthiest man of the city who was wont to dance at all weddings in order to cheer up the bride and groom.

A TAILOR

Too bad you did not inherit his wealth rather than his terpsichorean art.

NAHUM

Indeed, sir, I did. Fifteen thousand ducats, but where are they? I do not know. In my case, dances did not rhyme with finances. But really what need is there for ducats when one can be happy without them? Just see the Halleluiah dance.

(He dances and concludes every turn with singing the word "Halleluiah." Suddenly, a number of masked boys and girls appear, the former with poles and the latter with festoons of roses and dance rhythmically and silently. Finally they bow and with a shriek disappear. All look with rapture.)

NAHUM

I thought the rhymester could dance, but I see now I was all mistaken, all mistaken. Well, in former days, this thing was not tolerated, but these are new times. What do you call it, tailor? Yes, modernity. But it's pretty, nevertheless. It's pretty. Well, Samson, time to leave you alone. So good luck! May God help you to live long enough to choose grooms and brides for your grandchildren. May God help all Jews and also Nahum the Rhymester. May . . . may . . . may . . .

ALL

Good night, Samson, good luck and good night!

NAHUM

Good night, good luck for evermore,
May sorrow never know this door.

(NAHUM and the musicians go out.)

A TAILOR

He is a happy pauper, master.

SAMSON

All paupers are happy. (NERISSA comes in with a taper in her hand.) You wish to light the lamp, Nerissa? Yes, it is quite dark, now. In these early autumn days, the night falls suddenly like a black veil. Time for you to quit work, I think.

ALL TAILORS

Thank you, master. Good night, good night.

SAMSON

Good night to you all. (*All tailors leave hurriedly.*) Nerissa, where is Rosaline?

NERISSA

She has gone out for a stroll. She will be back shortly.

(*She lights the lamp and goes out, looking with astonishment and fear at SAMSON who walks to and fro nervously and whose face assumes gradually an aspect of profound sadness.*)

SAMSON

Yes, I must do it. There is no other way, no other way.

Nerissa, oh, Nerissa!

(*NERISSA appears.*)

Call the tailor.

NERISSA

I shall, sir.

(*NERISSA goes out through the left and SAMSON through the right. ROSALINE enters, sees the almost finished wedding-robe.*)

ROSALINE

Oh, how pretty! Just the ribbon sash here and a few buttons and it will be done. I'll try it on and surprise Nerissa.

(*She puts it on, hides herself behind the door and then calls aloud.*)

Nerissa!

NERISSA

(Appears and looks around.)

I thought I heard dear Rosaline calling. My ear must have deceived me. *(Goes out.)*

ROSALINE

(Again from her hiding place.)

Nerissa! Oh, Nerissa!

NERISSA

(Reappears.)

Ah, my big bride is playing like a little child, "Peek-a-boo." *(Looks around for her and suddenly ROSALINE appears clad in her wedding gown.)* Oh, Rosaline, you are as adorable as an angel.

ROSALINE

Does it become me?

NERISSA

Most charmingly. If only Uriel were here!

ROSALINE

I have a letter from him.

NERISSA

You have already told me once.

ROSALINE

Do you wish to hear it?

NERISSA

You have already read it to me once.

ROSALINE

I'm angry with you, Nerissa. I'm angry.

NERISSA

Come, little child. Be not angry with your Nerissa. You know the words carry enough of sweetness even for the tenth reading. Read it, Rosaline. Read, child.

ROSALINE

(Reads.)

To my little angel in Rome!

My lucubrations are reaching the hoped for end. In three days I shall be at home ready for the blissful ceremony which will bind our willing hearts in threads of hallowed gold. Time is a teasing, spiteful, cold-blooded creature: it runs swiftly when we wish to stay its course, and moves as slow as a snail when we are bound for great happiness; but move it must. So until the end is reached, remember your ardently and eternally loving—Uriel.

Now what say you, Nerissa?

NERISSA

The letter is like a deep-celled honeycomb filled with sweets. I'm happy, dear, happy in your happiness.

ROSALINE

Yes, I'm happy. Yet a little ounce of sorrow lies heavily here upon the bottom of my heart.

NERISSA

This is the way, dear, all brides feel. Happiness always comes somewhat diluted, or else we could not endure it.—But I forgot. Your father will now be angry with me.

ROSALINE

Why, Nerissa?

NERISSA

He has sent me on an errand, to bring the tailor, and I forgot.

ROSALINE

What does he need the tailor for?

NERISSA

Well, I imagine master Samson will order a new gown for you. So I must run. Adieu, dear!
(*Goes out.*)

ROSALINE

(*Alone.*)

A new gown! It cannot be.

(*SAMSON appears, who upon spying ROSALINE, makes a backward, evasive movement, when ROSALINE notices him.*)

You called the tailor, father?

SAMSON

Yes.

ROSALINE

But why? And why so dismal looking, father? What ails you?

SAMSON

Nothing ails me.

ROSALINE

Have you heard anything from Uriel?

SAMSON

No.

ROSALINE

Then tell me, father, what's amiss. There is something in your face that cries of misery.

SAMSON

Sit down my child and I'll explain to you.
I'll ask the tailor to take back the garments
And work no more.

ROSALINE

You are jesting, father?

SAMSON

I am in no facetious mood, my daughter.

ROSALINE

What mean you then?

SAMSON

Do you recall I borrowed
Two thousand ducats from Antonio
And pledged to pay within three months?
Today the period of time expires
And still I cannot pay. I hoped and hoped,
God will not in His kindness let you stand
Beneath the canopy in robes unpaid.
Oh, what a shame! Here gowns are made of
goodly silk,
And like small preludes to a feast of sound
Sweet tones of music daily fill the house;
And there at tables richly set, the paupers
Regale themselves and bless me for my bounty,
And Samson is not man enough to say:
"Oh, thank not me, not me; I'm generous

With ducats not my own." We like the incense
Although we may deserve it not. No, no!
I cannot bear the pretence and the sham.
The cat becomes uneasy in the bag,
I shall release her so that all may know
That Samson's wealth is a fictitious tale,
And poverty disgraces none, provided
We play not being rich. I've hoped so long for
The day when God would let me lead my daughter
Beneath the canopy and Rome would see
A wedding pleasing unto God and men.
But God ordained not so. So let it be.
And so a poorer wedding shall be yours,
A garb of coarser yarn, and the one-eyed fiddler
Shall do the music.

ROSALINE

Father, is that all?

External pomp is scarcely worth a tear,
And inner happiness can fully shine
Through robes of poverty.

SAMSON

Your words of comfort

And your unruffled spirit give me cheer,
And teach me how to breast the brunt of fate.
But listen more. Tomorrow I shall seek
A buyer for our wineshop to repay
My debt to Count Antonio.

ROSALINE

But father,

The wineshop gives us bread.

SAMSON

It gave us more,
But now—our debts come first. And after that?
God feedeth all; He'll feed us too, my daughter.

ROSALINE

Oh, father, father—

SAMSON

Wait, here comes the tailor.
Good evening, friend, you cannot guess the
message
I have for you.

TAILOR

Indeed I cannot, sir.
I trust you find no blemish in our work.

SAMSON

I find no blemish. See, it well becomes her.
Her face emerges from the mass of draperies,
A living lily gemmed with tears. Would that
It might be hers.

TAILOR

What mean you, master Samson?

SAMSON

You take it back. I lack the wherewithal
To pay you for your labor.

TAILOR

Do not mock me.

SAMSON

Our sages say: "Grown rich—believe it not,
Grown poor—believe." 'Tis a rotating wheel,
It elevates us to the very top

And blindly crushes us beneath its weight.
Times were when Rachel was among the living,
The portals of our wine shop never closed,
And Samson was the leading Jew of Rome
And happiness in every corner beamed.
My wife deceased. I said: God gave, God took.
I transferred my affection to my daughter,
My dying Rachel's dearest gift to me.
But then my wealth began to crumble slowly,
And now I cannot pay you for your raiment.
So take it back. Plain garments will suffice.
It's good she is a valiant Jewish daughter,
She understands, and Rachel will not blame me.
God grant that worse than this may not befall.

TAILOR

But I ask no money, sir.

SAMSON

And I ask no alms.

TAILOR

But keep the secret of your straits awhile,
And let the Jews of Rome participate
In Samson's daughter's wedding as behooves
The name of Samson.

SAMSON

I scatter to the winds
The fragments of a name outworn, outlived.
Go, friend, I am determined. Rosaline
Go, give him back his robes. The Count is coming.
I wish to be alone with him.
(ROSALINE and the tailor go out. ANTONIO
comes in.)

Good Count, you come in the nick of time, you had been in my mind before you overstepped the threshold.

ANTONIO

Thanks for entertaining me in so commodious and vacant an apartment. But you appear distraught, Samson. I suppose it's the wedding that all Rome talks about. Say, Samson, are you a Biblical scholar?

SAMSON

I've learned a little in my youth.

ANTONIO

The Bible relates about Jacob's waiting seven years for Rachel, and when the last night arrived, lo and behold it was Leah. Does the Holy Book anywhere relate about a Rachel's waiting seven years for Jacob and when the last night came, lo and behold it was someone else?

SAMSON

I gather not the meaning of your words. Besides, my ear is not attuned to jesting. Let us talk money matters.

ANTONIO

My ear is not now attuned to money matters. Better call the pretty bride and she will show me her silk and satin gowns you had made for her wedding.

SAMSON

I pray you, good friend, desist. I wish to talk to you about the debt.

ANTONIO

Well then let's hear about the debt.

SAMSON

Today the time expires in which I pledged to pay you the sum you were kind enough to lend me, two thousand ducats.

ANTONIO

And thirty-two per cent interest.

SAMSON

Yes, and thirty-two per cent interest. Alas I cannot pay. I'm in dire straits.

ANTONIO

That's good, exceedingly good!

SAMSON

Why good?

ANTONIO

Well then it's bad, yes exceedingly bad. What will my Samson do?

SAMSON

I'll sell my wine shop tomorrow, or the day after, and I'll meet my obligation in full.

ANTONIO

The obligation matures today.

SAMSON

I had hoped against hope until the eleventh hour that God would not let me part with that which gave me and mine bread and butter, but if

this is His will, I shall do so gladly. Surely my good friend who has been ever so many times kind to me in the past will allow me a few days to dispose of my wine shop.

ANTONIO

In Roman law, today does not mean to-morrow.

SAMSON

It may not mean in Roman law, but it does in compassion and fellow-feeling and elementary humanity.

ANTONIO

Roman law understands not soft femininities.

SAMSON

(After a pause, becoming harsher.)

What then do you want me to do?

ANTONIO

To give me your daughter.

SAMSON

My daughter, Rosaline? Cease your pleasant-ries. They fall like smarting salt upon my lacerated heart. My daughter is betrothed to Uriel and the wedding is to take place in three days. Besides God made her a Jewess and you a Christian and the two bloods can never mingle. I pray you, jest not.

ANTONIO

I jest not, Samson. Did you forget the pledge you gave me for the payment of the debt?

SAMSON

You mean a pound of my flesh?

ANTONIO

Yes, and from your breast.

SAMSON

Can it be you were in earnest?

ANTONIO

How innocent you are, Samson! You Jews according to common repute are as sly as a fox but really you are guileless as a child, as a little child. To be sure I was in earnest. Grant me your daughter and I tear this bond into little shreds and give you in addition two thousand ducats as dowry. But if you refuse me, if you prefer this Jewish pennyless commoner to a Gentile Count—

SAMSON

(In excitement.)

Then what?

ANTONIO

Then this bond is filed tomorrow in the Rota.

SAMSON

I do refuse!

ANTONIO

And the twelve prelates will grant me possession of my pledge which is a pound of your flesh.

SAMSON

No court of justice can grant it. It is not justice,

ANTONIO

It need not be. The chief auditor of the Rota is my uncle. And on the following day your breast will be ripped on a public scaffold. Do you refuse, Samson?

SAMSON

I refuse, I refuse! You may excise ten pounds of my flesh yet no unworthy hand shall touch the innocence of my daughter. Get out, you bloody cannibal, you blot upon God's noblest work, you pitiable specimen of inhumanity! Begone, before my wrath reaches my fists and does you wrong. Go tell your courts of justice: ten pounds of Samson but not a hair of Samson's daughter. You heartless murderer! (ANTONIO *disappears*. SAMSON *slams the door*.) God, my God, help me! (*Faints*.)

CURTAIN

ACT III

The Janiculum before the convent of St. Peter. A dense crowd of beggars, sick ones and cripples of all sorts is assembled at the convent door, each provided with a tin bowl for soup. At the left side of the stage, the gate of the Ghetto. From the right, Pope Sixtus V disguised as a beggar enters accompanied by his secret cameriere MONSIGNOR SANGALETTO. They step to the front of the stage.

BEGGAR-POPE

Can you tell me, Monsignor, the meaning of this generous display of loving kindness to the Lord's afflicted ones?

SANGALETTO

Nay, Your Holiness.

BEGGAR-POPE

Call me not Holiness here, you will betray me. Besides I have left my white vestments behind me in the Vatican. Here I am as I look, one of Christ's friends, a beggar.

SANGALETTO

Most people find it difficult to play their own God-given part well, and yet you play two parts so wondrously, so truthfully.

BEGGAR-POPE

Take me not as a Pope that plays the beggar, but rather as a beggar that plays the Pope. The coarse blood of common folks, of shepherds and gardeners, flows in my veins and I share in their little joys and sorrows. See, Sangaletto, see how happy these paupers are, with what relish they gulp down their solicited soup, and having emptied their tin bowls how piously they thank the Lord! It's only the crowned head of majesty that's most wretched and woebegone. I tell you there are two treasures in heaven, one is happiness, the other is royalty, and before the child is born, the soul is asked which it chooses; for no one can have both. Wise souls choose happiness and silly souls take royalty. But leave me now, Sangaletto, I wish to join these my brothers.

SANGALETTO

I would kiss the hems of your tattered garment, but you forbid and thus I must show my reverence by not showing it. So farewell, farewell, a smothered farewell.

BEGGAR-POPE

Farewell, my good Monsignor.

(SANGALETTO *leaves through the right. The*
BEGGAR-POPE *bends his back even more,*
steps to the Convent door and obtains a bowl
of soup, sits down in the shadow of a tree
and eats with gusto.)

BEGGAR-POPE

That was a delicious soup indeed, thank the Lord.

BEGGAR

(From the other side of the tree.)

Delicious you call it? Well you seem to know as much about broth as a fish about singing. You make me laugh, mumper.

BEGGAR-POPE

It tastes good to me.

BEGGAR

Maybe it does. I don't say it doesn't. But it could taste better for the twenty-five scudi which the good Count Antonio has paid for us. I tell you it's the monks and the sisters that take away the meat and the fat broth and leave for us only boiled water. I know these holy sponges.

BEGGAR-POPE

Is Count Antonio always so generous?

BEGGAR

Nay, nay. But he has won a law suit against a Jew, Samson by name. But you seem to be a newcommmer here. Whence do you hail, mumper?

BEGGAR-POPE

Why, I arrived today from Civita Castellana.

BEGGAR

You might have stayed where you were. Too many pigs spoil the pig-sty here.

BEGGAR-POPE

Life in Civita Castellana was very dull, people are too tight. Around the Vatican I thought people give alms more liberally.

BEGGAR
(*Laughs.*)

You make me laugh, mumper. The Pope himself likes to take and keep. Have you not heard of the millions of ducats he keeps in Fort St. Angelo? I'll tell you something. They say the Pope sometimes disguises himself as a beggar, puts a crutch under his arm and comes here to take a bowl of soup.

BEGGAR-POPE

I can't believe it. But tell me, brother, about the law case good Antonio won against the Jew.

BEGGAR

They say it was this way. Samson the Jew was going to the dogs, financially I mean. So he went to Count Antonio and borrowed money and promised to forfeit a pound of his flesh at his heart in default of payment.

BEGGAR-POPE

A pound of flesh! A strange pledge indeed. How much was the debt?

BEGGAR

They say two thousand ducats, quite a prohibitive price for a pound of Jewish flesh when a pound of bacon can be obtained for six baiocchi.

Good Antonio should be punished for that; for now all bacon dealers will raise their prices, too. Well, the day is declining, so I must go. You see this crutch? At home I throw it away and run on my legs like an urchin of twelve, but out of doors I always keep it by my side, and it makes me a fortune, it makes me a fortune. You should have crutches, too. Well, adios! (*Exit.*)

BEGGAR-POPE

Adios!

A pound of flesh and at the heart—how cruel!
The heart recoils e'en at the thought of it.

It is the acme of brutality.

Two years I swayed a mighty iron arm,
And every day some bandit hanged in public,
No malefactor high or low escaped.

At last I thought Rome was a Christian city,
But now I see Rome is ten thousand miles
Behind Christianity. 'Tis strange indeed.

The human mind has made unmeasured strides.

High up in space unbounded it ascends,

And from its lofty station it observes

The many bright and swiftly spinning worlds;

Into the smallest particle of matter,

So small as to elude the fleshy eye,

It delves and spies a thousand things colliding

And so man opens wide shrine after shrine,

And with the lamp of reason held aloft

He enters deeper, deeper into nature;

And yet the heart is still a cannibal,

The human heart still lives in ancient caves.

I've been a swineherd early in my youth,
And now men have made me their pastor;
But leading swines is easier than men.
Hush, Count Antonio! He looks so sly
And wily like a serpent. Let him fear
The Pontiff's crushing heel. I'll hide myself.
(*The gates of the Ghetto open. ANTONIO and
MARTHA enter.*)

ANTONIO

Well, have you seen Rosaline?

MARTHA

Yes, I saw her.

ANTONIO

And have you spoken to her?

MARTHA

Yes, I spoke to her.

ANTONIO

And what was the reply? Tell me quickly,
Martha.

MARTHA

None too gratifying, Count.

ANTONIO

You mean she refused me?

MARTHA

Yes, Count.

ANTONIO

That cannot be. How could she prefer that
common, impecunious, pale ghost, to me?

MARTHA

All this I explained to her. I described to her how fair my master is, how tall and muscular in arms—

ANTONIO

Yes, yes, and what did she say?

MARTHA

His heart how full of passion, a veritable King Solomon that can feed a thousand women with his love—

ANTONIO

And what did she reply?

MARTHA

How wealthy, how noble, a Count!

ANTONIO

Enough now. What did she say?

MARTHA

At first she said nothing, but kept her big, black eyes, red from weeping, fixed upon me and I let loose the reins upon my words, for had I stopped a moment the woman in me would have burst in tears. So full of sorrow were her eyes. And then she embraced me, kissing me, saying, "Martha, have you a father? Pity my father, my poor father. Martha, you are a woman too; why can you not feel with me?" Something began to choke me and to bar the escape of my words. But I ceased not speaking. I spoke of your manly charm and loveliness and of the only way she

can save her father's life, and suddenly, like a beast mortally wounded in its breast, she uttered a wild shriek and jumped with clinched fists upon me, and I ran out to save my life.

ANTONIO

It's a stubborn, silly people. Give them a good lashing on their hunches and they will kiss your feet, but give them gold, happiness and a name and they will bury their teeth in your hands.

MARTHA

I fear you will not have her.

ANTONIO

Fear not. The golden fish may wriggle in my grasp, but escape it can not. The pound of flesh will steal her proud obstinacy. Tomorrow, at the Bocca della Verita, Samson must uncover his breast to me; and until then Rosaline, I wager, will change her mind. Come, Martha, come.

(They betake themselves to the exit on the right of the stage, when the BEGGAR-POPE steps out, accosting them.)

BEGGAR-POPE

Good gentry, have you seen the Holy Father, the Pope, here?

ANTONIO

I have not, Lazarus.

BEGGAR-POPE

I am sure His Holiness is here. Aye, there He is. See you him not yonder among the trees?

ANTONIO

Yonder among the trees? No, I see him not.

BEGGAR-POPE

Well, see now, yonder on the road.

ANTONIO

Yonder on the road? Indeed, I see him not.

BEGGAR-POPE

Good Count, your optical instruments must be terribly foggy. To be sure I can not see him, but you can.

MARTHA

This mendicant seems to be slightly moon-struck.

ANTONIO

Get you gone, Bedlamite, or you may lose a costly rib or two. Get you off. (*Exeunt.*)

BEGGAR-POPE

(*Hops away.*)

Not so angry, merciful Count. Well, farewell, I am sure you will meet the Pope by and by. Farewell, my gold, my happiness. Farewell, you bloody, bestial soul, making unholy the human form in which you hide your blackness. How has your clay been touched by God! Plot, plot, Antonio, tomorrow the snake you feed in your heart will fling itself around your neck and send its poison back into your veins. Farewell, farewell, you'll meet the Pontiff by and by. Hush, what a noise and hulabaloo! Let me see.

(A great confusion and uproar. The stage becomes filled with people, shouting, wailing, screaming, "a doctor, a doctor." One man carries a girl, her wet hair hanging down and water dripping from her. She is laid on a rough wooden bench.)

ONE MAN

And have you called the doctor?

SECOND MAN

Yes, yes, I have.

THIRD MAN

Call her father!

FOURTH MAN

Who is her father?

FIFTH MAN

Samson, Samson.

FOURTH MAN

Is this Rosaline? I'll call him at once.

A WOMAN

Is this the sweet bride, Rosaline? Woe is me.

ANOTHER WOMAN

She was such a lovely little girl. Why did she do it?

A MAN

Make way! The doctor! the doctor! Move back, woman.

SECOND MAN

Move back, oh, move back!

(Hush. The doctor approaches and attends to her. All look with bated breath.)

THIRD MAN

How is she, doctor, how is she?

THE DOCTOR

It's nothing alarming. Let her lie still for a little while. Apparently she was pulled out of the water immediately.

A WOMAN

Yes, yes, I pulled her out but not so quickly. I was washing and beating my linen at the brink of the river. Suddenly I see a girl climbing upon the promontory that overhangs the dreaded whirlpool where they say two evil spirits of the water combat and make the water all around roar and boil, and where many a young bather sank and never came out again. I shouted to her, "Be careful, girl. Climb not further. You'll fall." But she heard me not, and having reached the highest peak she raised her two arms—thus—and dashed headlong into the seething whirlpool. I tarried not a moment. I've been a swimmer since I was a girl. And so I quickly plunged and made my way to her. I overtook her and seized her hand, but she with fierce might grasped me with her other arm by my neck and wished to pull me down, down. I struggled with her, I know not how long, until I clutched at her forelocks and saved her.

SECOND WOMAN

And did you not fear? They say bad things will happen to any one who saves some one else from drowning.

FIRST WOMAN

Who thinks of what they say when there is such a pretty little lady drowning?

THE DOCTOR

You are a valiant woman. Her father is much beholden to you.

A MAN

Make way, make way. Samson is here.

SAMSON

(Rushes in.)

Oh, Rosaline, my Rosaline, my dearest Rosaline, soul of my life, speak to your father, speak?

THE DOCTOR

Let her be, foolish man. It's nothing alarming. She was quickly taken out of the water. But she must have rest, quiet. Let all this multitude disperse. Let them go home.

ONE MAN

Go home, go home!

SECOND MAN

Let's leave them in peace.

ALL

Peace, peace.

(All withdraw except the BEGGAR-POPE.)

THE DOCTOR

Worry not, old man. She will feel better anon.
I bid you good night. (*Withdraws.*)

SAMSON

Good night.
(*He paces to and fro and wrings his hands in despair.*)

BEGGAR-POPE

Is your distress so very great?

SAMSON

Yes, my friend, it is.

BEGGAR-POPE

Then have faith in the Lord, Samson.

SAMSON

I have, my friend. But you know not the greatness of my suffering.

BEGGAR-POPE

I do know, Samson, I know all. But tell me why have you given him so brutal a pledge. Have you not brought with your own hands this misfortune upon you?

SAMSON

He suggested the pledge jestingly, and I laughed. Of what good is a pound of human flesh? I thanked him for his trust in me and for lending me money without any earthly security, and had it so stipulated in the bond. But now he is turning the jest into a bloody reality.

BEGGAR-POPE

I shall seek to help you, Samson.

SAMSON

I know your heart is good, but no one can help me. He has won the case in the Rota and tomorrow I shall be flayed. No one can help me save God.

BEGGAR-POPE

And God sometimes chooses the humblest and the lowliest to bring His help.

SAMSON

Your words are a balm but can not heal.

ROSALINE

(Faintly.)

Father.

SAMSON

Sweet Rosaline, how feel you?

ROSALINE

Better. But it were better if I did not feel better.

SAMSON

Speak not thus. It's a sin. It's as sinful to take one's own life as to take another man's life. All life is God's.

ROSALINE

I wished to save your life. Antonio means me, and once I'm gone, he will leave you in peace.

SAMSON

Your life is more important than mine. I have had my chance, my sunshine and my clouds, but you are a young flower just about to unfold your tender petals to the sky. No hand shall be laid on you.

ROSALINE

Father, why do we suffer so much?

SAMSON

(Falls upon her breast.)

I know not, I know not, daughter.

BEGGAR-POPE

If this is not a sin, I know not what is. Have you no faith or trust in God? For shame, old man, making his little daughter cry two days before the wedding and making her sweet eyes red. What will Uriel say? And see, Samson, she is all-wet and the cool evening breeze is blowing. What a merciless father! You must go home and warm yourself. You walk before, Samson, and I shall lead Rosaline. Come, come, thus. And tomorrow God will help. And then Samson will lead his little daughter beneath the canopy, and Uriel will stand by Rosaline's side and there will be music and candles and everybody will be so happy. I tell you tomorrow God will help.

CURTAIN

ACT IV

A square named Bocca della Verita. Two workmen give the last finishing touches to a scaffold. An afternoon.

BEPPO
(*Sings.*)

One glass, one little glass of wine
What wondrous magic in it lies!
All pain and sorrow melt away
Like clouds afloat in summer skies.

The little boy in us that fell asleep
In some forgotten, far off day,
Wakes up and rubs his dreamy eyes
And starts to sing and shout and play.

And then the heart is flooded o'er
With singing, surging waves, it seems;
We take a silvery light canoe
And paddle to an isle of dreams.

One glass, a little glass of wine
What magic, what good witchery!
All sorrow and all grief are gone
The heart becomes so light, so free.

(*He raises a mug of wine and drinks. CECCO takes it from his hands and sings.*)

CECCO

Indeed so good a thing is wine,
It makes us feel so glad.
If seas were wine instead of brine,
I'd choose to be a shad.

If angels drink, I'm sure they drink
The cherished drink of men.
If ink were drink instead of ink,
I'd choose to be a pen.

(Drinks.)

It's quite hot. The late summer sun is showing
what it can do.

BEPPO

Yes, indeed. *(Sneezes.)*

CECCO

God bless your heart, but I pity you.

BEPPO

Why so, brother?

CECCO

Have you not heard that if you sneeze three
times in succession you will be an old maid?

BEPPO

That's pretty bad. To be a maid is bad, and to
be old is bad, and to be an old maid is twice bad.
So in order to be on sure ground I'll sneeze again
and make it four times,

CECCO

Why do you not look at the sun. You know that if you feel like sneezing it's good to look at the sun.

BEPPO

Oh, I tried. It's only good at night. And here is a fellow with an ornament on his back.

(*URIEL enters, homeward from Padua, carrying some baggage.*)

URIEL

What is it, friend, you are building?

CECCO

What do you think we build?

URIEL

Why answer a question with a question. If I knew I shouldn't have inquired.

CECCO

A synagogue, sir. Do you wish to be the cantor, the one that chants, thus? (*Delivers a staccato.*)

URIEL

No, this has no appearance of a house of worship. Tell me, friend, what will this be?

CECCO

Well, then a pig-market.

URIEL

Are there so many pigs in Rome that you must open a new market?

CECCO

But we will sell here Jewish pig.

URIEL

A pig is un-Jewish.

CECCO

Well, then, we will sell here Jewish un-Jewish pig. (*Excitedly.*) You muddle my wits, Jew. What do you want of me?

URIEL

Why irritated? Just tell a friend in intelligible prose what this is to be.

BEPPO

I'll tell you, sirrah. This is to be a jolly junket.

URIEL

A jolly junket?

BEPPO

Aye, aye, and all the Romans will be gathered here and a kind Jew will let his heart be excised for the diversion of the Romans.

URIEL

What devil hides in you that you talk about such cruelty in accents so calm and unruffled?

BEPPO

But he can live without such a thing as a heart. I have heard many Jews do.

URIEL

Hold your tongue, ruffian. What human hand will do the excision?

CECCO

The noble Count Antonio Zavello.

URIEL

Count Antonio? . . . God! who is the Jew!

CECCO

Samson, his name is.

URIEL

God, it's the bond! My father, Samson!

(Runs out.)

CECCO

Samson his father? And I thought he had no son.

BEPPO

Samson is his future father-in-law and a father-in-law is in law a father.

CECCO

So this is Uriel who is to marry the pretty Rosaline. All Rome is agog and astir over this wedding.

BEPPO

Yes, indeed, he is just returning from Padua, ready for his nuptials. Poor thing.

CECCO

No wonder my words struck him like a thunderbolt. He seized my arms and clinched them with iron fingers and gave me such a jerk that I thought I would have to walk a mile around to pick up my little bones.

BEPPO

I think you will not like to engage in a friendly chat with him again.

CECCO

I think not. We sometimes think the Jew a humble and timorous creature, a worm. Rail at him, if you please, spit upon him. Trample him. But, by the holy Virgin, there is something in him which, when hurt, will suddenly transform the creeping worm into a howling giant. Give me the mug, Beppo. (*Drinks.*)

BEPPO

Say, Cecco, will you keep your eyes wide open when Antonio digs his scalpel into the Jew's breast?

CECCO

Surely, and as wide as this. (*Shows him with his hands.*)

BEPPO

And will blood flow?

CECCO

I'm not certain that this red wine flows in a Hebrew's internal aqueducts, but if it does, it will doubtless gush abundantly.

BEPPO

I think I shall not look at that part of the scene. I'll close my eyes—thus—or I'll turn aside. You see, Cecco, I have a weak heart.

CECCO

There you are, Beppo, a week hearted old maid. No wonder you sneezed three times. You beetle-head, Count Antonio is giving a picnic to the Romans. 'Twill be a grand sight. Now tell me, nincompoop, is a sight for the seeing or for the blind? I, too, have a human heart. I never assassinated a spider. My mother-in-law, everlasting peace to her, (she is still awfully alive,) taught me that a Christian must not cause a spider to die. But this is a Jew, mooncalf. 'Twill be a grand scene.

BEPPO

Maybe you're right. I guess you *are* right. But a Jew is a living thing.

CECCO

The Jew, my dear milkmaid, is the devil's apprentice. Know you this? (*Both cross themselves.*)

BEPPO

Indeed I have heard it full many a time.

CECCO

And he has horns and a tail, too. Know you this?

BEPPO

I have heard that, too. Once I was employed at the house of a Jew in the Ghetto. The master was gone, and I was alone with his little boy, a black-haired, clever-eyed little man. I wished to

see the horns and the tail of that little Jew, and so I spoke to him kindly and sweetly, until he trusted me and came over to me.

CECCO

Well, Beppo?

BEPPPO

I felt his head and his other place, but no horns, no tail.

CECCO

You beetlehead, those Jews have the power to draw in their horns and tails. And when you approach them, they look human, perfectly human, just like you and me.

BEPPPO

You are wise, Cecco, and well informed. So tell me, is it true what I have heard, that our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, was a Jew?

CECCO

Now you have sinned. Indeed you have sinned. And next Sunday you must mention it in your confession. Jesus, our Redeemer, was an Italian.

BEPPPO

Was He, Cecco? Thank you, Cecco. I am so glad.

CECCO

To be sure He was. I see His name in every Italian book. He lived in a town called Bethlehem; it must be not far from Rome.

BEPPO

Thank you, thank you, Cecco. I am so happy,
so happy.

CECCO

Hush now. We were so buried in the matter
of our conversation, or in the conversation of the
matter, that we noticed not what was going on.
See, the square is filled and the scene begins anon.

*(During the foregoing a mass of people gradually
fill the stage. Now the CHIEF AUDITOR,
scribe and other officials clad in their regalia,
enter and mount to their seats. Then
SAMSON with ROSALINE and URIEL and hal-
berdiers. Behind them ANTONIO and
MARTHA in the guise of a page.)*

ANTONIO

There is something pressing on my heart. I walk
As if I went to *my* doom, not to Samson's.

MARTHA

My count, when woman starts to play the man,
Let man not take the part of woman.

ANTONIO

Martha,
You know I meant not Samson, but his daughter.
Alas, when acts miscarry, they create
A train of acts which we perforce must play
Until the bloody end. Come, Martha, follow.

(They mount to their seats.)

CHIEF AUDITOR

I hope, my fellow Romans, you know well
The essence of the case. The Rota granted
To Count Antonio a pound of flesh
From Samson's breast, the nominated pledge
Now forfeited by failing to repay
The past due debt of twice a thousand ducats.
We therefore gather here to execute
The Rota's just decision and do justice.
For justice means not just to *see* the right,
But seeing it, to give it flesh and blood
And cage the airy truth in solid facts.
Oh, Samson, have you ought to say?

SAMSON

The earthly court already passed its judgment,
I can only file my case in the court on high
Where truth and justice speak a different
language.
I've nought to say, but, if the court is gracious,
I shall exchange a word with these my children.

CHIEF AUDITOR

We gladly grant you, Samson, this request.

SAMSON

Come here, my daughter, God may help me yet.
So cry not, child.

ROSALINE

Oh, father, oh, my father!

URIEL

I can no longer, father, rival you
In bearing on my face the mask of calm.

My stormy feelings break their chains asunder
And cry like wounded wolves. How can you,
father,
How can you be so imperturbable?

SAMSON

Like water to the fish, so suffering
Is to the Jew. It is our element.
It is the air we breathe; and not to suffer
It to be short of breath. Now, magistrate,
I'm ready.

CHIEF AUDITOR

Have you scales, Antonio?

MARTHA

Aye, sir, and here it is, a truthful balance.

URIEL

Hold off a while, oh, Count Antonio,
What profit is there in a pound of flesh?
Man is the crown of all divine creations
And yet his flesh won't fetch us one baiocco;
Combine, I pray you, mercy with reflexion,
Here is your capital and interest,
And keep your hands unsoiled with human blood.

ANTONIO

The debt is now past due and Roman law
Awarded me the pledge.

URIEL

There is a law
God graved indelibly upon your heart,
Why need you Roman law?

•

ANTONIO

I want the pledge.

MOB

The pledge, the pledge, Antonio, the pledge.

SAMSON

The rabble is athirst for Jewish blood.

URIEL

(To the mob.)

Oh, many-headed, monstrous ignorance,
Oh, pack of wolves, oh, heartless, Godless creatures,

Why howl and clamor thus for Jewish blood?
What have we done, what crime have we committed,

Except to give a Prophet to the hounds
And Holy Writings to a herd of swine?
What have we done to you? I feel in me
A weak and wordless cry of centuries
Of casting our young sons to hungry lions
In order to regale old Roman matrons
And pampered Caesars, centuries of pyres
And pillories and pious Inquisitions
And wallowing in our blood. What have we done?

I know God's hidden purpose wills us suffer,
But woe to them that deal us all this torture.

MOB

The pledge, Antonio, the pound of flesh!

URIEL

I do not curse, I only pity you,
You leprous hearts, you crippled sickly souls,
You maddened rabble, you unfinished things
Who have left the beast but have not reached the
man.
I pity you.

MOB

The pledge, the pledge, the pledge!

CHIEF AUDITOR

The Romans are uneasy; hasten, Samson,
And bare your breast.

SAMSON

Oh, grant me, magistrate,
One fleeting moment more.

CHIEF AUDITOR

'Tis granted, Samson.

SAMSON

Uriel, hear. If God vouchsafed me not
To lead my daughter to the canopy,
Oh, let me see her now in your arms.
Uriel, pray, embrace her.

ROSALINE

Father, father!

URIEL

How ill a time and place for shows of love.
Come, Rosaline. Let's take our father's blessings.

SAMSON

May God his blessings shower upon you, children,
Remember Rachel and forget not me—
Antonio, I'm ready now. I bare
My heart. You seem to like a Jewish heart.

URIEL

Halt, halt. I can not see this bloody act.
Halt, murderer, or I will turn your dirk
Into your filthy entrails.

ANTONIO

Unhand me, Hebrew cur!

CHIEF AUDITOR

Oh, part them, halberdiers! Oh, quickly part
them.

SAMSON

Uriel, cease, I pray you, cease, oh cease!
Uriel, such a rage is not becoming
A member of our race. We take not fate
Into our own hands. Antonio,
My breast awaits your knife. Pray, tarry not.
God, in Thy hands my spirit I commit.

VOICES

Make way. Oh, move aside! Aside! Make way.

(A SENATOR, *on a white mule, clad in black, with
a golden chain across his breast, enters and
rides through the wonder-stricken crowd.*)

SENATOR

The Holy Father sends me to exhort
Antonio to pity the poor Samson.

ANTONIO

Indeed, I pity him, but he must pay.

SENATOR

Can Samson pay his debt?

URIEL

Aye, sir, he can,
And here's the capital, with interest.

ANTONIO

The debt is due no longer. 'Tis the pledge
The law awarded me.

SENATOR

Once more I ask you.
Antonio, just add an ounce of Christ
To your too legal soul.

ANTONIO

I want the pledge.

SENATOR

Chief Auditor, a witness has been found
Who has a word to say. I'll let him come.

*(He makes a signal. A royal lifeguard hurries
to the Vatican, and before long a group of
lifeguards arrive and make way. A flourish
of trumpet is heard and the POPE, mounted
on a mule, surrounded by several cardinals,
comes in.)*

POPE

I'm the witness, Count Antonio.
These men here think Antonio demanded
A pound of flesh as surety for his loan.

What needs the Count a pound of Jewish flesh
When pig is well digested in his paunch?

Nay, nay, Antonio is passing sleek.

The pledge he planned might be a crimson string
To pull and bring the stubborn, lovely heifer.

Alas, poor Count, the Jews think much of honor
And innocence is not a coin outworn.

The cord with which you would the heifer bring
Thus tore and you may hang yourself therewith.

You calculating scamp, you scoundrel, draff of
mankind,

You liked not Samson, but you liked his daughter.

Could you have thought you might seduce a
Jewess

Or slay a guileless Jew and I would slumber?

Could you forget so soon the many culprits

That daily hung and swung upon that bridge?

Nay, fear not. You may yet be spared the gibbet,

And that for Samson's sake and not for yours.

For little would he prize his rescued life

If some one else would lose through him his own.

So bend your knees before him, Christian eyesore,

Perchance he'll let you breathe your filthy breath.

ANTONIO

(*Kneels.*)

Oh, Samson, sin is an intoxication

That casts a sleep upon the man in man.

I knew not, Samson, what I willed to do.

The Holy Father's words have sunk in me

Like flaming iron bars. Oh, I recoil

With shame from my unworthy, sinful self.

Forgive me, Jew. My life is in your hands.

SAMSON

I rub my eyes. O can all this be real?
Support me, Rosaline.

ROSALINE

Yes, father, real.
'Tis sudden and yet real.

URIEL

God has saved us.

ANTONIO

Indeed, God saved you. See you not He saved
you.
Now save your foe's life, too.

SAMSON

All life is God's
And who am I to grant life or deny?
Oh, rise, Antonio; with all my heart
I'm ready to forgive and to forget.
And pray accept the full amount I owe you.

POPE

Nay, nay. Let Samson keep the whole amount
As his indemnity. Antonio,
Run home now, glad that you escape alive.
And when you pass that bridge, think 'twas a Jew
Who robbed you of a chance to show your art
Of dancing yonder in the windy air.
And when you see a beggar, talk not loud
Lest he report your plotting to the Pope.
Run home.

(ANTONIO kneels before the POPE and goes out
through the crowd.)

SAMSON

Your Holiness, I am not gifted
To make my gratefulness speak howso feebly,
But in our silent prayers to our God
I with my children shall remember you.

(Bends and kisses the hem of his garment.)

POPE

Nay, nay. It is the Christian that must kiss
The hems of Israel's robe and ask forgiveness.
Now, farewell, Samson.

SAMSON

Farewell. God be with you.

POPE

And be not all too lavish with your heart
In dealing with your friends. Farewell, farewell.

VOICES

Long live the Pope!

OTHER VOICES

Long live the Holy Father!

OTHER VOICES

Long live the Jew!

(Flourish of trumpets. The POPE ascends his mule and leaves the stage together with his retinue of cardinals. The whole populace disperses after pressing the hands of SAMSON. The latter, URIEL and ROSALINE are left alone.)

URIEL

The riffraff's mind is mercurial, it changes.

SAMSON

The mercury of friendship always follows
The sinking and the rising of our fortunes.
But see, Uriel, this great Christian Father
Is like a jewel, solid and unshrinking.
Oh, one such man puts honey into life
And makes religions clasp and kiss each other.
I'm very faint.

ROSALINE

What is it? You're so pale.
How feel you, father?

SAMSON

Truly like a ghost,
Who from his grave returned. I'm very tired.
Tomorrow is the day of happiness
For me, for you my children and for Rachel.
So let's go home and rest. But see, the dancers!

(A number of masked boys and girls appear, as in Act II. The former with poles and the latter with festoons of roses and myrtles, and dance rhythmically and silently. Finally they bow and disappear with a shriek.)

URIEL

They must have heard the news of our release
And hied to greet us on this very spot
Of tears and joy.

SAMSON

See how the west is blazing
And every cloud that passes turns to gold.
In moments of distress we noticed not
How beautiful God's world around us was.
Come, children, come. On either side a child.

(Exeunt.)

CURTAIN

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